

OLOF SWARTZ IN BOSTON, 1783

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On his way to the West Indies Olof Swartz stayed eight weeks in Boston. He gave an account of his visit in a letter home, published in *Upfostrings—Sälskapets Tidningar*. A reference to this obscure publication had been given by Wikström (1829: xxxiv) in his biography of Swartz. Nevertheless, Hooker (1840: 383) in an appreciation of the famous Swedish botanist wrote that he “passed a year in North America”. Subsequently Sargent (1947: 44) in a footnote in the *Silva of North America* repeated the fact stating “Having spent a year in North America, he visited the West Indies”.

The references to Swartz being in North America for a year are false, however, and the story of his visit to Boston has remained largely unknown, although Rydberg (1907: 16) gave the correct dates of his arrival and departure, stating that Swartz “sailed in a merchant vessel to Boston, where he landed the 3rd of October. He did not intend to stay there, but took the first opportunity offered him to go to Jamaica. He left Boston on the 26th of November . . .” Stearn (1980: 2) recently wrote of Swartz’s contributions to West Indian Botany, and noted, “On 5th August 1783, having completed his studies in medicine and natural history at the University of Uppsala, where he had been a student of the younger Linnaeus, Swartz sailed from his native Sweden for North America. He was twenty-two years old and furnished with adequate private means . . . It took Swartz five months to get there (Jamaica), two months longer than Sloane had taken in 1687, for he voyaged first to Boston, Mass., observing “Pingvine” (Great Auk, *Alca impennis*) off the Newfoundland banks, where these now extinct flightless birds were slaughtered so prodigally and mercilessly. He arrived on 3 October 1783. A letter, printed in *Upfostrings-Sälskapets Tidningar* (Stockholm) 1784 no. 27 (8 April 1784), describes his Bostonian botanizing. He left Boston on 26 November 1783 aboard a ship bound for Jamaica . . .”

During his stay in Boston Swartz also collected specimens and they are now in the general herbarium in Stockholm (s). Unfortunately, Swartz hardly made any annotations on his specimens. He only wrote the name of the plant on the back of the sheets and 19th century curators (Wikström) have marked the sheets “Herb. Swartz”

and in a few cases only "ex Amer. Sept." In a letter to P. J. Bergius, printed in *Läkaren och Naturforskaren* 8: 327-334 (1787), Swartz mentioned that he also sent a few packets of North American herbs to Bergius. Apparently these were lost, however. Swartz stated that he "then never heard of them but there is all reason to believe that they were lost in the autumn gales". There are no Swartz specimens from North America in Bergius' herbarium (SBT).

To the following translation of Swartz's letter we have added in parentheses the modern equivalents of the species listed as well as an s if there is a Swartz specimen in Stockholm. It should be noted, however, that these specimens may have been collected elsewhere, since Swartz failed to give any localities on his specimens. In a few cases it is not clear what plant Swartz had in mind and this is indicated by a question mark.

"Oct. 2, 1783. A tongue of land called Cape Anne became our first touch of land at the destination of the journey. We all beamed with joy. Several kinds of land birds: falcons and sparrows flew around the ship. *Certhia pusilla* (brown headed nuthatch) then became a nice present for me. Towards the evening the whole extension of this land met us and at 3 o'clock p.m. we were already among the rocks, where the meeting with the guides became as agreeable as that with the land birds. We now had no more than 12 English miles left, and this way, which was between the most beautiful of sights, was covered before the evening, when we had the whole of Boston in view. We anchored here at the Kings-Road and came the day after closer to the city. The view from this harbour is similar to that of an amphitheatre, where hundreds of ships cover the bridges towards the sea-side. We considered our early arrival so much more fortunate, since a Danish ship, which had spent 4 whole months on the sea, recently had arrived.

Oct. 3. After 30 days spent on the sea, I now had the joy of putting my feet on solid ground, on a land where nothing but Freedom reigns; a place, which still can be compared to the society of an ant-hill. Boston is a town, which not all geographers have neglected to describe, but I must mention that the town is 4 English miles, and it has 16 churches. Outside the houses there are the American elm, linden, the white walnut tree etc. Gardens are here of considerable value. Every house has its own, and much money is spent on it. In these there is an abundance of *Cucumeres & Cucurbitae*, which surround both windows and doors. *Chrysanthema*, *Verbasca*. *Aco-*

nita, *Delphinia* and several European herbs decorate these gardens. The flora now had lost its prosperous summer appearance so there was not much for me to get. However, I visited on the 6th, 9th and 12th of this month the shores of the bay. *Panicum crus-corvi* (*Panicum crus-galli*, s), *Amaranthus hypochondriacus* (s), *Amaranthus lividus*, *Acalypha virginica* (s), *Potentilla canadensis* (s), *Potentilla norvegica*, *Viola primulaefolia* (s), *Portulaca oleracea*, *Euphorbia maculata*, *Salicornia virginica* (s), *Phytolacca decandra*, *Dactylus cynosuroides* (?), *Erigeron canadensis* (s), *Sarotra* (*Hypericum*) and the following, *Salsola rosacea* (NB calycibus explanatis corolliformibus & corollatis) (*Salsola kali*, s), *Salsola salsa* (*Suaeda maritima*, s), *Aster linifolius* (*Aster subulatus*), *Aster novae-angliae*, *Mollugo verticillata* (s), *Ambrosia elatior* (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia* var. *elatior*, s) and others were still to be found as well as our *Carduus lanceolatus* (*Cirsium vulgare*) and *Polygonum aviculare*, which seem to follow Man all over the Earth. The late gathering of this Flora was a great joy to me. Of my highly beloved cryptograms I have seen no others than those which are common to the whole North. The insects have not left me without any shares, which is proven by a big and beautiful *Papilio*, *Gryllus carolinus*, *Gryllus danicus* (both crickets), *Gryllotalpa* etc.

I intend to visit the towns in the neighborhood and among those New Cambridge, remarkable because of its academy, which however is still said to be in its beginning. On the 6th this month a professor of medicine was installed there [Professor Benjamin Waterhouse]. But no foreigner has yet been accepted as a teacher.

Oct. 8. I went out somewhat more than a Swedish mile (6 English miles) from the town, to see what was left of the Flora. *Uniola maritima* (?), *Aster tardiflorus*, *Conium rigens* (*Conium maculatum*?), *Bidens frondosa*, *Coreopsis bidentis* (*Bidens cernua*?), *Polygonum maritimum* (*Polygonum glaucum*), *Datisca cannabina* (s), *Cannabis sativa* (s), *Chenopodium maritimum* (*Suaeda maritima*, s), *Salicornia vulgaris*, *Salsola rosacea* (*Salsola kali*, s), *Tanacetum vulgare*, *Sonchus* and *Dactylis* were all that I found.

Oct. 15. The cold was now so strong that despite a constant fire in my rooms, the thermometer never rose above 10 degrees.

Oct. 18. During an excursion, which today was held about a Swedish mile from the town, I again came across *Sarotra gentianoides* (*Hypericum gentianoides*, s), *Vaccinium ligustrinum* (*Lyonia ligustrina*, s), *Hyoseris virginica* (*Krigia virginica*, s), *An-*

tirrhinum canadense (*Linaria canadensis*, s), *Juniperus virginiana* (s), *Cupressus thyoides* (*Thuja occidentalis*), *Stipa capillata*, *Solidago canadensis*, *Scirpus tristachius* (?), *Aster linarifolius*, three or four new species of lichens and one *Polygonum*, which however like Kalm's (*Polygonum*) *erectum* must be something new.

Mr Richard Söderström, who not only in New York but also here in Boston is Royal Swedish Consul, has everywhere gained such confidence, and I am pleased with the many and great acquaintances to whom he has introduced me. The way of life here is beyond all my praise, since it seems that the newly acquired freedom has led to a laudable as well as a great courtesy towards strangers. At least I enjoy a greater respect and courtesy than I could and should have expected in such a distant country. Seemingly good financial resources must be the reason why I have had to pay 8 piasters (dollars) a week for board and lodging. This will soon put an end to my travelling funds. Consequently I have tried to become a ship's doctor but I received the answer that those are not hired during peace time. Nevertheless I continue the journey with the small amount of money I still have: *Audaces Fortuna juvat!* However, if I could get some kind of subsidy, some public grant, I could stay here so much longer and get so much more done for the benefit of science, for the development of which I am here. Ternström, Kalm, Hasselqvist, Torén, Osbeck, Löfling, Köhler, Rolander and Martin had their salaries; but like Montin, Bergius, Solander, Baron Alströmer, Falk, Thunberg and Sparrman I had to travel on my own accounts without any public grants.

I must not forget the women! Of them I can say no more than that Nature here has provided them with all kinds of attractions. They are also in this province considered to take precedence over those from other colonies. All entertainment, comedy, tragedy, opera is here forbidden. However, some ball is now and then arranged, but this is very seldom. Next week I will travel 60 or 70 English miles further down the country and in the company of Mr. Consul Söderström, and my friends will be informed about everything that I manage to observe during the journey.

Olof Swartz"

The "Kings-Road" anchorage Swartz mentioned is now called President Road or Broad Sound and is the entrance to the inner harbor of Boston between Deer Island and Long Island. Landing on Deer Island one can walk to Winthrop, Revere and the North Shore. Most of the plants Swartz named can be found in the area today. However, several botanical names can not be placed, and specimens which reveal their correct identity have not been located. The binomials *Conium rigens*, *Coreopsis bidentis*, and *Scirpus tristachius* can not be associated with any modern species. *Dactylis cynosuroides* may be *Spartina cynosuroides*, which is represented in the herbarium of the New England Botanical Club by single specimens from the New Hampshire-Massachusetts border and from Plymouth, Massachusetts. *Uniola maritima* is suggestive of *Uniola paniculata*, a species not found north of Virginia. *Cannabis sativa* may have been valued at that time as a source of fiber or seed. It certainly does occur in the Boston area today but is poorly represented by modern collections in herbaria. *Datisca cannabina* does not appear to be recorded from the United States. The Swartz specimen (s) does not bear a geographic location, but Swartz would have known this European plant.

In Swartz's other letters there is no reference to his intended trip of 60–70 miles farther into the country or to his activities during the end of October and November before his departure for Jamaica. There is also no record whether Swartz sent his Boston collections directly to Sweden or carried them with him to Jamaica.

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